



**Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council (BAC)
Bycatch Utilization Subcommittee
Meeting Minutes – March 12, 2024**

Subcommittee Members: Brian Gabriel (Chair), Chelsae Radell, Duncan Fields

Call to Order: Chair Gabriel called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. Brian Gabriel and Chelsae Radell were present, with Duncan Fields absent.

Also present were Bycatch Advisory Council (BAC) members Linda Kozak, John Jensen and Eva Dawn Burk.

Thirty-four individuals attended the meeting.

Approve Agenda: The agenda was approved.

Meeting Minutes: The meeting minutes from January 30, 2024 were approved.

New Business: A request was made at the previous meeting to receive information regarding the regulations and agency authority for allowing the retention and sale of halibut and for determination of proceeds. Linda Kozak reported that, after reaching out to NMFS and IPHC officials, the following process would need to occur.

- a) For retention and sale of halibut by trawl vessels, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council would request a regulatory change to be made which would be forwarded to National Marine Fisheries Service. This would then need to receive final approval by the International Pacific Halibut Commission.
- b) Regarding the issue of designating proceeds for research, management or other purposes for species other than halibut, this would require action by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.

Public Comment: Seven members of the public provided comment. Following is a summary of issues raised by public comment regarding utilization of bycatch.

- If bycatch were to be allowed to be retained and sold, the proceeds should be for research.
- All bycatch should be surrendered and no compensation given to the harvesting sector.
- Concerns were raised about incentivizing bycatch or eliminating the need to reduce bycatch.
- Market implications for the directed halibut fishery were raised regarding the sale of small halibut into the market.
- Bycatch utilization would result in 100% mortality and this could increase wastage if the fish can't be processed and is discarded by the processor or sent to a fishmeal plant.
- Need to look at all gear groups and fisheries if utilization is to be considered. Every fishery has bycatch.

Virtually all public comment received at this and previous meetings reflected opposition to the idea of allowing or requiring bycatch to be retained and sold.

Summary of Issues and Challenges:

The subcommittee and Bycatch Advisory Council members who were present at the meeting spoke briefly about the report to the BAC and if previous issues were full addressed. The issues and challenges identified at the December 19, 2023 meeting are shown below:

- IPHC regulatory restrictions for retention and sale of halibut
- Other regulatory changes that can help reduce bycatch
- How bycatch proceeds can/should be utilized (such as observers or research)
- Transportation challenges
- Supply chain issues
- Tariffs and foreign production impacts
- Work force availability and cost
- Processing plant configuration issues to process certain products
- Market conditions
- Poor quality product if required instead of voluntary
- Small fish that are not easily processed
- Prohibited species vs. regulatory discards
- Processor participation and partnerships

Other issues were discussed to include in the report:

- Impact on directed halibut fishery if small halibut were retained and sold into the market place.
- Likely the processing sector would need subsidies in order to create processing infrastructure and additional workforce to process bycatch.
- Additional costs to catcher and catcher processing vessels, as well as processors would result.
- Bycatch mortality would increase to 100% and potentially little benefit would result.
- Concerns about incentivizing bycatch would need to be addressed.
- The entire seafood industry is experiencing severe market downturns resulting in financial struggles.

The subcommittee members present did not develop a recommendation to provide to the Bycatch Advisory Council.

A report will be submitted to the Bycatch Advisory Council at their April 16, 2024 meeting. No additional subcommittee meetings are being proposed.